

Warwickshire Botanical Report 2010

WARWICKSHIRE FLORA GROUP REPORT NO. 1 FEBRUARY 2011

It is not often that a Warwickshire Plant becomes so famous that it finds itself featured in the Daily Mail. A Wild Pear tree (*Pyrus communis* ssp. *communis*), checked by Steven Falk at Cubbington Woods did just that. It wasn't just any pear tree, it was found to be the biggest in the country with a girth of over 12 feet. But it was where it was found that made it so newsworthy. This 200-plus year old tree, one of only three confirmed Wild Pear trees in the county, is growing directly on the path of the proposed High Speed Rail Link from London to Birmingham. Pictures of the tree have been used in the local and national press by action groups opposed to the rail link. Currently it is the most famous tree in Warwickshire.



The Cubbington Wild Pear

Northern Yellow-cress

While trying to see if he could locate more sites for Marsh Dock (*Rumex palustris*) at reservoir localities in Warwickshire, Brian Laney had a look around the edges of Earlswood Lakes on 14th September. Sadly no Marsh Dock was found but an unexpected find did show up. Five plants of Northern Yellow-cress (*Rorippa islandica*) were recorded growing on or between the small jutting out sections of the concrete edge by the water's edge. One of these plants had the distinct fruit that all droops downwards to one side. Brian was 100% sure of his find due to seeing this species before in Scotland and Somerset.

A voucher specimen was sent to Dr Tim Rich just to be 101% sure and he confirmed the species as Northern Yellow-cress. That specimen is now in the Welsh National Herbarium and it looks like the population at Earlswood Lakes is the most easterly site for this species in the UK to date. Spurred on by this major discovery Brian Laney targeted other reservoirs within the county in case Northern Yellow-cress had appeared there as well. Brian checked the concrete edges of the whole of Shustoke Reservoir straight after work in September. No Northern yellow-cress was located but at various points around the reservoir on the concrete edge were flowering and non flowering plants of Narrow-leaved Ragwort (*Senecio inaequidens*)



One of the Earlswood Northern Yellow-cress specimens (left), foliage of Narrow-leaved ragwort (right)

Draycote Water

On the 26th September Brian Laney virtually walked round the whole of Draycote Water checking for Northern Yellow-cress. Sadly again no plants were found but a number of other interesting species were found. Golden Dock (*Rumex maritimus*) was recorded in various locations all around the reservoir edge sometimes growing as quite large specimens with large specimens of Marsh Dock. Marsh Dock was first recorded new for the county back in 2000 by Brian and it is good to see it is still present at Draycote Water. Brian also spotted a dock hybrid at several sites that he thought could be a possible hybrid between Marsh Dock and Curled Dock (*Rumex crispus*). This was later confirmed by Geoffrey Kitchener as *Rumex x fallacinus*, a first county record.

A species Brian was keeping his eyes out for while checking drawdown zones of reservoir sites within the county was Mudwort (*Limosella aquatica*). It was at the last part of Draycote Water just as the light was starting to give up that Brian Laney found a population of Mudwort growing in a large muddy inlet opposite the large wooden bird hide. Many of the Mudwort plants were in fruit but the flowers were closed up due to the lateness of the day.



Marsh and Golden Dock (left) and Mudwort, all from Draycote Water near the bird hide

The attractive pink-flowered Hedge Bindweed that Brian Laney recorded from two spots at Draycote Water has been confirmed by John Poland as *Calystegia sepium* f. *colorata*. Steven Falk found a similarly coloured plant at Brandon Marsh a few weeks later that needs further investigation. Always check the hairiness of the stem to ensure that it is not Hairy Bindweed (*C. pulchra*.)

Jon Bowley and Sarah Shuttleworth of the Habitat and Biodiversity Audit at Warwick Museum have also sent in a range of “goodies” for 2010. In June Jon found Dyer’s Greenweed (*Genista tinctoria*) growing at May’s Hill Farm near Henley and a population of Common Cotton-grass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*) on the spoil heap at Edge Hill Wood. Jon also saw four species of Cotoneaster on a visit to the Coventry Power Station site in October. One of these, Tree Cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster frigidus*) can grow into a 15 metre tree in the wild. Although there is a comprehensive key in Stace (2010) that covers 86 species, many are difficult very to identify. Self-seeded populations of various species are not unusual on urban wasteland.

News from the North

In 2009 Lesley Barton-Allen, the biodiversity officer at the RSPB Middleton Lakes reserve ran a series of workshops to encourage a small group of enthusiasts to improve their identification skills. After her departure in 2010, this group, now led by Monika Walton, continued to survey the site. This included monitoring the large population of Golden Dock, discovering a few plants of Blue Water-speedwell (*Veronica anagallis-aquatica*) and finding the second Warwickshire site for Bog Pimpernel (*Anagallis tenella*) a much-declined specialist of wet heathland and bog. Sharp-eyed John Bates spotted this insignificant 2 inch long, non-flowering plant growing between rushes in a mossy ditch. Photos were quickly taken and identification was confirmed by Steven Falk, who knows it well from his recent surveys of the New Forest.

In October, nine months after her departure, Lesley's own records for Middleton Lakes were passed on to Warwick Museum. Amongst these were Leafy Spurge (*Euphorbia esula*) and Marsh Stitchwort (*Stellaria palustris*), neither of which have been seen in VC38 since the nineteenth century. Little Mouse-ear (*Cerastium semidecandrum*) was recorded by Brian Laney growing from the end of a grass island spit of short turf in a car park in Sutton Park on the 2nd May. Only the second modern record for the county, it was seen growing with Small Cudweed (*Filago minima*), Buck's-horn Plantain (*Plantago coronopus*) and Sand Spurrey (*Spergularia rubra*). A specimen was sent to and confirmed by Mr P.M Benoit the BSBI referee for Cerastiums.



Bog Pimpernel (left) and Small Cudweed (right)

The discovery, by John Harris, of a meadow near St. Lawrence Wood, Hartshill full of thousands of Eyebrights (*Euphrasia* sp) was a real surprise and shows how easy it is for even large populations of plants to be missed. More Euphrasias were seen nearby at Caldecote by Mike Dixon. Specimens are currently with the BSBI referee.

John Harris also spotted the second record of Houseleek (*Sempervivum tectorum*) on a roof in Mancetter and a group of Common Cudweed (*Filago vulgaris*) plants in Hartshill Quarry.

Maurice Arnold who lives and often botanizes in the Staffordshire part of VC38 (yes there is one, on the east side of Tamworth) also recorded Common Cudweed from Stonydelph.

Some Interesting Sedges

Michael Senior found the first county record of Tufted Sedge (*Carex elata*) growing beside a stream to the North-east of Coombe Abbey Country Park, and Thin-stalked Wood Sedge (*Carex strigosa*), this time only a second county record, was spotted in wet woodland near Baddesley Ensor by John Walton. Maurice Arnold discovered the third modern site for Star Sedge (*Carex echinata*) at Hockley claypit. Brian Laney was a member of a small group that was given permission to visit Coleshill Pool on the 19th May. A specimen of a distinctive, bluey-green sedge found there was confirmed by Mike Porter as White Sedge (*Carex canescens*). A number of clumps of this species have appeared in an area where recent clearance of invading willow scrub had been undertaken at the site.

In April Brian Laney discovered a large patch of Spring Sedge (*Carex caryophyllea*) on an interesting steep south facing embankment on the north side of the A4177 at Hatton.

Orchids

A single spike just starting to flower of Bird's-nest Orchid (*Neottia nidus-avis*) was found by Brian at Ufton Wood in May growing in mossy areas just to the south east of a trackway in the wood. A few flowering spikes of Green winged Orchid (*Anacamptis morio*) were spotted from Steve Lane's moving car on the A452 just south of the roundabout junction for Hampton in Arden in May. Straight after work that evening Brian Laney went back to have a closer look and counted four flowering spikes. Sadly within two weeks of the discovery the verge was mown off, but the plants should survive and Brian Laney plans to check on the population in 2011.



Bird's-nest Orchid (left) and Green Hellebore (right) two of our rarer woodland specialities.

Hellebores galore and other interesting plants

Steven Falk decided to revisit the two existing sites for Green Hellebore in Warwickshire. The colony in Bannams Wood that consisted of only 50 plants in 2003 had grown amazingly to several hundred! The other site at Mays Wood was also doing well. We seem to have lost seven sites for this plant since the Computer Mapped Flora was published in 1971. It is an early flowerer and lurks under hedges so please keep your eyes open for it. A small population of Meadow Saxifrage (*Saxifraga granulata*) was recorded by Brian Laney during a botanical survey in open bare soil on the car park edge at Lunt Fort on the 14th April. The population was recognized only by its basal leaves as there were no flowering plants due to recent mowing. Brian was leading a party round Ufton Fields for part of the Warwickshire Trusts Reserves Open Day on the 12th June when an unexpected surprise was a single spike of Common Broomrape (*Orbanche minor*) that was spotted by Steve Batt. It was in perfect condition and many photographs were taken. Several more specimens of this broomrape were also spotted in the canal-side meadow near Stockton Cutting, which also produced one of the finest displays of Bee Orchid (*Ophrys apifera*) seen for many years, albeit mostly very stunted individuals

While looking over a restoration site called Wood Farm near Bubbenhall on the 6th August, Brian spotted one small plant in flower of Common Ramping Fumitory (*Fumaria muralis* ssp *boraei*) growing close to one of the newly created large lakes. More plants of this species were seen by Brian while waiting for the train at Canley Station on platform two in Coventry on the 22nd September, and a flowering clump was even reported in Warwick as late as November.



Common Broomrape near Stockton (left) and Maple-leaved goosefoot from the A46/M40 junction (right)

Road improvement schemes - a blessing for plants?

The various road modifications of the A46/M40 junction created a number of new roadside verges with open ground which looked ideal for something of interest to appear on them. So on 24th July Brian went to investigate. Two single individual plants of Maple-leaved Goosefoot (*Chenopodium hybridum*) were found in two separate areas of the road scheme. A number of small rosettes of Wild Clary (*Salvia verbenaca*) were found on a section of freshly disturbed ground by a new balancing pool in an area virtually cut off by the new road system. A leaf of this species was confirmed on the "help desk" at the BSBI exhibition in November by Sean Karley.

Cornfield Knotgrass (*Polygonum rurivagum*) was found in two places. Specimens were again confirmed at the BSBI exhibition meeting.

A section of the A452 north of Balsall Common where road modifications have taken place in 2009 have again in 2010 turned up a number of species either scarce or rare for the county. Interesting species noted include: Bird's-foot (*Ornithopus perpusillus*), the alien grass Cockspur (*Echinochloa crus-galli*), Green Nightshade (*Solanum hysalifolium*), Common Ramping Fumitory (*Fumaria muralis* ssp *boraei*), Apple-of-Peru (*Nicandra physalodes*), Field Woundwort (*Stachys arvensis*), Thorn-apple (*Datura stramonium*), Treacle Mustard (*Erysimum cheiranthoides*), Night-flowering Catchfly (*Silene noctiflora*) and Green Bristle grass (*Setaria viridis*). Corn Spurrey (*Spergula arvensis*) and Corn Marigold (*Chrysanthemum segetum*) were still present as recorded in 2009 but the Corn Marigold was in far less quantity in 2010. One large non flowering plant and several seedlings of Round-leaved Crane's-bill (*Geranium rotundifolium*) were found on the east side of the A452. What was most interesting about the unusual plants found here is that they seemed to represent a mixture of arable weeds that had presumably arisen from an old in-situ seedbank, plus an interesting array of exotics and adventives seemingly bought in with imported earth.



Common Fumitory and Common-ramping Fumitories nicely contrasted (left) and Treacle-mustard (right), just a few of the many interesting plants found along the A452 near Balsall Common

A beautiful fern

Camille Newton took photographs of a strange looking Hart's-tongue Fern from The Square in Kenilworth back in the summer which she showed Brian. Brian realized it was possibly a crested form of Hart's-tongue and sent pictures to Martin Rickard an expert on fern cultivars and varieties. Martin emailed Brian back saying the Hart's-tongue from Kenilworth is from the Ramo-cristatum group which is usually simply referred to as the Cristatum group. Martin mentioned this variety looks very much like the form which comes regularly into the UK from Holland. While taking photos of the fern Brian bumped into a lady who works in a shop nearby who mentioned the wall it was growing on was going to get cleaned up. Brian mentioned that the fern was an important find and at the current time, November 2010, the fern is getting quite big. The only worry is that these attractive fern varieties are prone to be taken by gardeners or collectors so let's hope this fern variety is still there in future years.

Photographs by Steven Falk.

Brian Laney, Steven Falk, John Walton and Monika Walton February 2011.